

QUEEN'S CHOICE

By CAMPBELL MACLEOD

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The jester bowed low before the throne. The king extended a much bejeweled hand. The jester bent over it reverently and silty bit it. The queen laughed behind her fan and beckoned the clown to her side. He sank on the steps at her feet.

"This is my throne for tonight," he announced, gayly jingling his bells. "I shall surrender it to no one. For one night I shall speak only the plain, unvarnished truth, your majesty."

"One who would speak the truth, Sir Cap and Bellis," replied the queen sagely, "must needs have some previous experience."

"Ha, ha!" chuckled the king, beaming at the vision at his side. "Well said, my lady. Previous experience, Sir Fool!"

Age jangled in the voice of the king; youth bubbled in the laughter of the jester. The queen unconsciously leaned on the arm next to the clown and closed her eyes for a moment to rest them from the bewildering sight before her. To be queen of one of the most splendid Mardi Gras balls is something to turn a girl's heart. But this one, to judge by her weary eyes in spite of the magnificence surrounding her and in face of the king's open devotion—was bored. And the evening was only beginning.

The jester at her feet played with his bells and hummed "If Ever I Cease to Love" in time with the musicians far overhead. As he sang he watched the face of the queen. Suddenly she turned to him.

"Sir Fool," she said gently, "that air goes not with that get-up. Save your voice for 'Tell Me, Pretty Maiden'."

"Would she listen if I told her, think you?" he whispered eagerly. "There has never been but one pretty maiden for me, your majesty."

"A maid is but a maid," the queen returned slowly, "and a man but a man, and love is but—"

"Everything!" the jester interrupted seriously. "Love is all."

The king called the second time, then had to touch the arm of the queen before she heard him. Two strange princes stood waiting to be presented. Behind them came a train of Cupids, Lohengrins and monks, each bearing a tray of compliments. The queen's eyes were big and suddenly bright. The king sat with his fat hand on his heart and listened to her bandying repartee with each in turn. The jester's bells were silent. He was attentively studying the queen's pink nails on the hand resting on the vase of magnificent roses near the throne.

"You should have been a queen," the king announced ponderously as the last troubadour moved off.

"You were born a queen," the jester whispered eagerly.

"This splendor shall always be yours," the king continued in business tones. "Everything shall be yours that money can buy. But you were fitted for a real throne."

"Kind hearts are more than coronets," the jester sang softly to the air of "Under the Bamboo Tree." "And the truest throne is a throbbing heart, lady." The queen frowned at him impatiently and turned to the king, who was presenting two foreign generals, ablaize with decorations. No, she was not dancing, she told them. The king couldn't dance, and it flattered him that she was so well content on the throne beside him. The incident was full of significance. He had wealth, social position, everything but her, and now it seemed that his patience was to be rewarded at last. What woman could hold out in such a fight? The queen sighed and brought him back to earth. He turned eagerly to her. She was looking far away. Her thoughts, even to a casual observer, were far removed from this crowded ballroom.

"You sighed, your majesty," he begged humbly. "You share my throno. Let me share your trouble, whatever it is."

The queen laughed merrily. The jester touched his bells.

"Margot!" he whispered eagerly.

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The queen ignored the appeal. A merry crowd of troubadours were approaching, and she paid for their compliment with a fire of smiles and pretty speeches.

"If you would marry me," resumed the old king suddenly when the crowd departed with backward bows and obeisance and they were alone save for the jester, whom he did not see, "you shall be queen in a palace as beautiful as even you could desire."

"Margot!" entreated the jester. "Love is everything!" The queen frowned at him impatiently.

"Marry me," pleaded the old king hoarsely. "You are not one who can stand poverty. Your mansion shall be a palace; your jewels shall rival a queen's."

"Marry me," whispered the jester, catching hold of the hand behind the rose. "Today I bought a house, Margot. True, there are but four rooms in it, but no place could be half so dear. You could transform it into a home, Margot. I have no jewels but those of my love to give you, Margot, but you know that is true!"

"You shall cruise in a yacht on summer seas," continued the deaf old king, "and all Paris and London shall rave of your beauty and your splendor."

"We could slip off together to the park," whistled the jester. "Listen to the band on Sunday evenings. Don't you remember what you told me under

those moss draped trees that night?" The queen toyed with her fan and sighed. "I love you! I love you! I love you!" chanted the jester passionately.

"As my wife," resumed the king, "you will always be the queen of scenes like this." The eyes of the queen swept the house before her—the upon tier of beautiful women in gorgeous gowns and jewels, men whose admiration and preference counted for a great deal, and, above all else, the atmosphere of wealth and culture and beauty. Could she afford to reject it all?

"I am old," the king continued sadly. "All that is left in life for me is you. Surely for the few years remaining could you not share them with me? Think—gently—"what it would mean to you—afterward. I ask no love!"

"I am young," the jester whispered eagerly. "I love you. Things are beginning to change for the better with me. Can you afford to sell yourself, Margot, for gold? What are the king's millions to my love, Margot?"

Into the eyes of the queen a great light suddenly leaped, but she sighed again when she looked at the king. One by one the maskers were straggling up to say good night. Far overhead the musicians were playing again. "If Ever I Cease to Love," the carnival air. The king bent wearily toward her. "Shall I come for my answer tomorrow?" he asked patiently. Then, with fresh ardor, "You will not walk the world's way weeping when the coachman bids you ride, your majesty?" he questioned pleadingly.

"My love!" the jester's lips touched her hand—"if you choose the palace, who will keep my home?" The queen suddenly caught the clown's fingers with a thrilling grasp. Quick as thought he slipped a ring on the third finger of her left hand.

The king and queen had risen to depart.

"I shall come for my answer at 4 tomorrow," he reminded.

"Why—not take it tonight?" the queen asked shyly. "I can never marry you, your majesty, because I am to wed another."

"To wed another?" the king faltered pitifully. "To—wed—another?"

"This is he, your majesty," the queen replied, turning to the jester.

"Think," the king pleaded. "Think—"

"The queen has thought," the jester announced in many tones. And he knelt and kissed the cold hand of the king.

A CHEERFUL VIEW.

When Orlas Ransome of Potterville saw the bill rendered by the physician who had ministered to his ill for three days in New York he puckered his lips and gave a shrill whistle.

"My stars, Orlas, you aren't going to give that man any such sum of money as that, now, are you?" demanded his wife, with much spirit. "You know it's extortion—you know!"

But to her amazement, Mr. Ransome placed his hands in his pockets and tipped back the hotel chair in a position that indicated peace of mind.

"Now, see here, Endory," he said tranquilly. "I didn't sense it at first, but when you consider that in Potterville I'd have had to be sick most six months to run up a bill of that size we've got something to be thankful for that I was took with that spell here instead of at home."

Mrs. Ransome pressed her hand to her forehead.

"But supposing you had only been sick those three days at home, and—she began with a bewildered air, finding small comfort in her husband's reasoning—"why, then—"

"We've no need to suppose," said Mr. Ransome, with cheerful firmness. "We've got to take the decree of Providence just as they come. You dwell on the thought of my being saved six months in bed right in the heat of summer."

MUCH MORE POWERFUL.

Professor Smith was once lecturing on natural philosophy, and in the course of his experiments he introduced a most powerful magnet, with which he attracted a block of iron from a distance of two feet.

"Can any of you conceive a greater attractive power?" demanded the lecturer, with an air of triumph.

"I can," answered a voice from the audience.

"Not natural terrestrial object."

"Yes indeed."

The lecturer, somewhat puzzled, challenged the man who had spoken to name the article.

Then up rose old Johnny Sowerby.

Said he: "I will give you facts, professor, and you can judge for yourself. When I was a young man there was a little piece of natural magnet done up in a neat cotton dress as was called Betsy Maria. She could draw me fourteen miles on Sunday over plowed land no matter what wind or weather there was. There was no resistin' her. That magnet of yours is pretty good, but it won't draw so far as Betsy Maria!"

A RUSSIAN CUSTOM.

"That man," said the photographer, "owes me \$20 for a dozen cabinets. I wish I dared to treat him as he would be treated in Russia."

"In Russia if you don't pay your photographer's bill he hangs your picture in his window upside down. Every Russian photographer's window has five or six of these reversed pictures in it, and there is always a little crowd of people outside craning their necks and saying:

"Oh, that is Vassil Popofsky. Won't he be ashamed! And look at Anna Olinsky. You'd think she'd be able to pay." Is that Senni Gogol there? It certainly is. What pity!"

"Russian photographers, thanks to this unique method of theirs, have few unpaid bills. If only their method was in use here!"—Chicago Chronicle.

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THE SWELLING TOAD.

Curious Points About This Oddity Among Animals.

The wonder of the genus bairdii and the greatest natural history oddity to be found along the Atlantic coast of the United States is the swelling toad, a semi-aquatic creature known to naturalists as buromachalista. It is occasionally met with from New York city to Jacksonville, Fla., but is most common along the coast of Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina. When in its natural state the "swell toad" is about the size of a large bullfrog, but looks more like a fish than it does like either a frog or a toad. It is about six inches in length and has the curious faculty of being able to swell to the size of a football, in which state its legs, tail and head are scarcely visible.

Irritation appears to be the chief factor in causing these curious creatures to inhale air until they swell almost to bursting. The bellies of both the males and females are nearly pure white and are covered with spines which give that portion of their anatomy the appearance of a well ripened jimson bur. Persons who understand the "swell toad" and know what an irritable little rascal it is catch it and rub the spines on its belly, when it swells up until it is utterly helpless. Another curious point about the creature is that as long as it is kept on its back it is unable to expel the air so as to reduce the swelling.

HUMAN QUALITIES.

According to This Writer, Women Are More Civilized Than Men.

Havelock Ellis in his study of "the most interesting beings in the world"—namely, men and women—formulates the conclusions that there is hardly an organ of the body or quality of any kind that is not unlike in the sexes.

A man is a man even to his thumbs, and a woman is a woman down to her little toes. Let man, with his vaunted superiority in everything, cultivate a proper feeling of his real standing in view of Mr. Ellis' statement that women "are unquestionably superior in general tactile sensibility and probably superior in the discrimination of tastes," with (to be perfectly impartial) no advantage either way in the other senses, but they have better memories, read more rapidly, bear pain better, recover better from wounds and serious illnesses, are less changed by old age, live longer and have relatively larger brains, especially in the frontal regions. Women, to put it in a few words, are more civilized than men.

On the other hand, Mr. Ellis finds men are slower in mind, with greater strength of body (they are two, three and four times as strong as women), quicker in movement, with much greater lung capacity, more blood corpuscles and exhale twice as much carbon dioxide, but these last qualities are rather drawbacks than otherwise, since men are less able to endure confinement and bad air.

DARTMOUTH UNIVERSITY.

In a copy of the Portland Gazette published in 1817 there is an allusion to "Dartmouth university."

Dartmouth college was founded by a charter granted before the Revolution, and the state of New Hampshire sought to take away the charter rights and use the property as a part of the new university, which was chartered by the legislature. The point was raised that the legislature had no right to do this, and it was so decided by the United States supreme court after a memorable exposition of the case by Daniel Webster. The Gazette pokes fun at the university, which, it states, "has one student," who "may serve as a nest egg."

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